



February 19, 2019

The Honorable Jared Huffman
Chairman, Subcommittee on Water, Oceans, and Wildlife
Committee on Natural Resources
U.S. House of Representatives
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Tom McClintock
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Water, Oceans, and Wildlife
Committee on Natural Resources
U.S. House of Representatives
1329 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Re: Subcommittee Hearing on Healthy Oceans and Healthy Economies: The State of Our Oceans In the 21st Century

Dear Chairman Huffman and Ranking Member McClintock,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input to the Committee's hearing: Healthy Oceans and Healthy Economies: The State of Our Oceans In the 21st Century

Our ocean is a 21st century wild west; its resources are in peril and its governance is weak - and yet it is also a major economic frontier, ripe for exploitation. Policy needs to be forward-looking and agile in responding to these opportunities and challenges.

Overfishing, pollution, habitat loss and climate change have resulted in coastal and ocean ecosystems that are often unrecognizable from their pre-industrial state. These changes are accelerating – including the dramatic projections of climate change impacts on our oceans, coastlines, and low-lying areas. This leads to lost economic opportunities and threats to the safety, livelihoods and culture of coastal communities in places like Florida, Puerto Rico, Hawai'i, Texas, Rhode Island, and every other coastal state.

At the same time, there are clear opportunities to derive more economic value from the phenomenal size and productivity of the ocean, to deliver new sources of energy, and to build resilience to growing climate impacts.

Emerging technologies now enable us to reach parts of the oceans that have been inaccessible until now, with parallels to the 'wild west' era - opening up a region of untapped potential but limited governance.

Smartly designed policy, including leveraging new technologies such as satellite monitoring and unmanaged submersibles, and partnering with coastguard and military interests, can help the ocean to support a thriving US economy while respecting its ecological and cultural significance. Sticking to the status quo would fail to maximize this opportunity; leave economic assets and communities exposed to unacceptable levels of risk; and drive overexploitation, wholesale conversion of territory into poorly regulated productive systems, and loss of species akin to the fate of the American Bison in the 19th century.

Conservation International believes that a positive vision for the ocean's future is achievable, and that government, academia, civil society, and the private sector all have important roles to play.

For example, in Hawai'i our work with the local fishing communities is supporting a vibrant culture and economy around seafood. Hawai'i's fisheries are valued at \$539 million and provide over 45 million lbs. of seafood annually. Working with traditional and local fishers we are creating markets for sustainable seafood, implimenting seafood tracebility, and working with businesses to reducing seafood waste.

Similarly, strong conservation in the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument led to over \$100 million of investment in research, vessel operations, and education in the first ten years of its establishment. Lessons learned from research and management in this remote part of the archipelago have also helped to transform management practices and science in the populated islands. Such momentum has helped to inspire the State government, all four counties, the University of Hawai'i, and the Office of Hawaiian Affairs to commit to the Hawai'i Green Growth initiative and goals of the [Aloha+ Challenge](#).

The private sector

It is particularly notable that looking out to the ocean will provide rich opportunities for businesses to innovate and develop new product lines in fields such as aquaculture, algae production, maritime technology, insurance, and renewable energy – alongside the ongoing revitalization and recovery of wild-capture fisheries and the growth of ocean-facing industries including shipping, ports, marine engineering and coastal tourism. Businesses (and municipal governments) would also benefit greatly from increasing their awareness of the many risks they face from accelerating ocean change – an awareness which is often lacking at present.

Conservation International is partnering with universities, governmental and non-governmental organizations to develop the Natural Capital Protocol for the Ocean – a framework, case studies and guidance to help business leaders to assess these opportunities and the options available to them, by considering their dependencies and impacts on ocean natural capital.

National Security

On a global scale, the human importance of the ocean becomes clear: The asset value of the global ocean has been estimated at \$24 trillion¹; 2.4 billion people live within 100 kilometers of the coast²; 90% of global trade is shipped²; more than 3 billion people depend on fish for at least 20% of their total animal protein intake³; 93% of the heat released by climate change has been absorbed by our ocean⁴; and the ocean provides 99% of the living space on planet 'Earth'.

1 WWF, Reviving the Ocean Economy — The Case for Action. 2015

2 United Nations, The Ocean Conference Factsheet: People and Oceans, 2017

3 FAO, Fish and human nutrition factsheet

4 IUCN, Explaining ocean warming: causes, scale, effects and consequences, 2016

Many of the most vulnerable communities - and the highest unemployment rates – are found in coastal and port communities, across a range of countries from Colombia to China. Sea-level rise and increasing impacts from hurricanes, storms and flooding is already exacerbating the situation, and this will only intensify in future. These social conditions often contribute to increased social unrest, illegal activity, and migration, which impacts on US national security interests. By investing to maintain healthy forests, wetlands, aquifers, and rivers, we can help blunt the impacts of natural disasters when they strike and make communities more resilient to extreme weather events.

Targeted U.S. investment in international conservation efforts contributes to America's long-term foreign policy objectives and enhances U.S. economic and national security interests around the globe.

Science and data

Conservation International employs economic analysis, innovative financing, and ocean science to support coastal communities, businesses, and policymakers in securing a positive, sustainable future.

The Ocean Health Index has scientifically measured the state of the ocean for the past seven years. It is the first and only ocean assessment tool to scientifically assess key elements from all dimensions of the ocean's health – biological, physical, economic, and social – equipping managers and policymakers with meaningful information to help manage oceans sustainably. While the global average score has remained fairly stable at 70/100, the United States' ranking has dropped from 53rd in the world in 2014 to 91st in 2018; its score is now 68, below the global average. Significant declines have been seen in the US scores for fisheries, natural products, coastal protection, and biodiversity. The large decline in the coastal protection score, from 94 to 75, is in part due to a substantial loss in coastal sea ice in Alaska, as climate change impacts accelerate.

More detailed regional Ocean Health Index assessments have been completed for the US west coast and for Hawai'i, providing insights to inform management decisions in those regions. Declines in coastal and ocean habitats in these regions are having negative consequences to ocean economies and livelihoods. For example, tourism in Hawai'i is directly linked to Hawai'i's unique natural environment, generating \$24 billion annually. But Hawai'i's alluring habitats are literally eroding - 72% of Hawaii's beaches are shrinking, and up to 50% of coral cover has already been lost in some areas over the last five years, with greater losses projected to follow as oceans warm further.

The ocean, once considered inexhaustible and unknowable, is now open for business. Understanding and respecting the resulting opportunities, dependencies and risks; encouraging innovation and new technologies; nurturing sustainable businesses; and ensuring that regulatory frameworks are agile and ready for the changes ahead will ensure that our ocean frontier will positively influence economies, communities and ecosystems for decades to come.

Sincerely,



Dawson J. Hunter
Senior Director, U.S. Government Policy
Conservation International